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Double-sided tape

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Double-Sided Tape: Affect, Amazon and A Science Project

Fiona Murray

Abstract

This paper brings together Amazon, consumer reviews, a science project and ordinary objects in order to examine how affect works between and within them, both sticking them together and breaking them apart.

Affect, Consumerism, Patriarchy

This tacky tale begins with a confession that I am one of Amazon's 'prime members'. I was awarded this membership status from Amazon for my inability to temporarily stand outside of capitalism, for my outstanding consumerism and for being the stuff of marketer's dreams. I abhor Amazon's reputation for its domination of the market, and its treatment of its employees *and* in what appears to be in the same breath, I enjoy the free postage and the quick deliveries. I like plugging into the impersonal flows of the reviews written about all the hundreds and thousands of ordinary objects available for purchase. The sensations that these objects create in me, as I scroll through them, hit me in a place of non-consciousness, of non-thinking, in a place of blind feeling¹. It is only when I appropriate these impersonal affects in my prehension that I click 'Buy Now'.

At the same time, I've been trying to *not* shop there anymore.

My most recent falling off the wagon was last Thursday when I needed to buy double-sided sticky tape for my daughter's science project. People even write reviews for tape. It was the tape called, 'Double-Sided Invisible Affect Tape', that foregrounded itself enough for me to click on it for more details. It had two reviews. First I read the descriptor. Here is what it said: 'Invisible Affect Tape is Amazon's double-sided sticky tape of choice due to its incredible strength. It uses a most exceptional adhesive glue named 'Affect' glue.'

The description goes on to cite Brian Massumi's words to allude to this strength when it reads, affect is "the invisible glue that holds the world together. In event. The world-glue of affect is an *autonomy of event-connection* continuing across its own serialized capture in context,"² as the tape rolls and unravels, picking up particles as it goes.'

I feel excited because there is a double-sided sticky tape branded by something written by Brian Massumi. But my excitement is short-lived, because in talking about affect I realise that my excitement is only personalised content, in context, that has nothing to do with affect that is more about 'continuation in trans-situation,'³ only entering context, in a series of events, as "nonsubjective and impersonal potentiality, intensity, and force that cannot be attributed to any particular bodies or objects."⁴ I feel the double-sidedness of my own situation. I think to myself that if I fully embrace the ideas of non-intentionality of the human subject, then that means that my consumerism is not really my fault yet now that this has come to light in writing, I sense a predicament. Maybe I should stop now and write a different paper that brings something else to light before I need hone my response-ability.⁵ But it seems too late. I continue reading, writing.

The descriptor continues: ‘Adhesives generally are either structural meaning that they make permanent bonds such as in cooling or melting, or they make pressure sensitive connections that tend to be able to come apart, that is unless they have been held together over a long period of time and the bond is becoming-structural. Affect tape uses a pressure sensitive adhesive. It forms bonds simply with the application of a light pressure, a little force. But due to the strength of affect, there is often not much force required, and often it will pick up items left in its wake. As Gregg and Seigworth write, “Affect is in many ways synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter* [but this is a] bit of a misnomer, since affect need not be especially forceful (although sometimes... it is)...often it transpires within and across the subtlest of intensities: all the miniscule events of the unnoticed.”⁶ With affect glue, the coming together of the objects, of tiny particles is often unnoticed.’

This is a selling point for me, not just because the tape’s descriptor now draws on both Massumi and Gregg and Seigworth, but because of the mini events of the unnoticed. My daughter’s science project needs her to gather particles on each side of the tape, to look at them under a microscope and to recreate them in a larger scale using art materials. In a sense, she is looking to see the new and different connections that must happen through a process of affective transfer between objects, substrates and different kinds of bodies.

The descriptor ends with: ‘Affect as double-sided adhesive works within and between objects and bodies, and the world that it holds together. Affective glue, although invisible, is at the centre, of the “excluded middle,”⁷ of all connections. Due to its productivity, this tape is an Amazon choice tape.’

Before I click ‘Buy Now,’ I read the two reviews.

Review 1 – The Impression this tape left on me.

This double-sided tape should come with a warning. There is a double-sided reason for this.

Firstly, this tape is extraordinarily powerful. I asked my father to pass me the tape, and in handing it to me, he pressed it into my skin. But this is a pressure-sensitive tape with very powerful glue. As Sara Ahmed writes, “*We need to remember the ‘press’ of an*

*impression...*the very affect of one surface upon another, an affect that leaves its mark or trace.”⁸ The tape stuck my father and me together. In that second, I became his adherent.

We laughed at first as we tried to tear ourselves from one another without ripping each other apart. I liked our individual bond, but the idea of the social bond did something else. Being an adherent, like the tape itself, has a double-sided meaning. One meaning is to stick fast, surface to surface, but another is to be in support of or to uphold. My father, I believe, has some profoundly misogynistic ideals that I didn’t want to support or uphold. I didn’t want to be stuck to him, or for our connection to be mobilised in any form. My sense of our connection was caused by my previous histories of contact with my father, and that this new literal bond was recreating my contact as an individual body with the over-familiar collective body of the patriarchy, that at this moment, I adhered. Ahmed writes, “Histories are bound up with attachments precisely insofar as it is a question of what sticks, of what connections are lived as the most intense or intimate, as being closer to the skin. The encounter moves us sideways...and forwards and backwards (the histories that are already in place that to these associations and not others make stick, and that allow them to surface in memory and writing).”⁹ We both move, trying to pull the tape off our skin, negotiating the space between us, where the invisible world-glue, that attaches us, connects us, (un)removed from each other, was also what was moving us. It was what both moved us and held us in place, keeping our father-daughter-experiences hanging by a thread between us.

Adhesion is what connects separate surfaces. Cohesion, however, is about how stickiness sticks to itself. Cohesion is the binding force that congeals. It is the gluttonous in the glue. It is about how things cohere in a certain way. Adhesion is how a raindrop sticks to a window, as it slides and slips downwards. Cohesion is how we come to have a raindrop at all rather than just a wet surface. The cohesive forces must be greater than the adhesive force, a greater viscosity, or else everything and everybody falls apart from the middle.

I would have given this tape just two stars for this reason but soon I realised that it also had the potential to create new connections, forming new social bonds as it sticks to different surfaces with different capacities, and in so doing, changing shape, a body passing from “one state of capacitation to perhaps an augmented state of capacitation”.¹⁰ This change is felt with the unravelling of the double-sided tape of separation-connection or as Massumi writes, “what we would normally think of as the self on the one hand and the body on the other, in the unrolling of an event that’s a becoming of the two together.”¹¹ So I thought this could also be a positive thing and ended up giving the tape four stars. I look to review 2.

Review 2

Does what it says on the tin. 5 STARS.

My daughter shouts through, ‘When will it arrive? My homework is due in on Friday.’ I hover above ‘Buy Now’ and know that I shouldn’t do this. She shouts ‘Mum!’ And I click ‘Buy Now’. It takes a millisecond. I feel remorse, and shame and wonder how long that will last before I am back on Amazon going through the same cycle. I tell her it will be here in the morning.

‘That’s fast’, she says.

Notes

¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978).

² Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (London: Duke University Press, 2002), 217.

³ Ibid., 217.

⁴ Ken Hillis, Susanna Paasonen, and Michael Petit, *Networked Affect* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015), 6.

⁵ Karen Barad, “On Touching - The Inhuman That Therefore I Am.” *Differences* 23, no. 3 (2012): 206. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-1892943>.

⁶ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.

⁷ Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, 24.

⁸ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 6.

⁹ Sara Ahmed, “The Skin of the Community: Affect and Boundary Formation”. in *Revolt, Affect, Collectivity: the Unstable Boundaries of Kristevas Polis*, ed. Tina Chanter and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 95.

¹⁰ Brian Massumi, “Of Microperception and Micropolitics: An Interview with Brian Massumi.” Interview by Joel McKim. *Inflexions No. 10: Modes of Exhaustion*, August 15, 2008, http://www.inflexions.org/n3_massumihtml.html

¹¹ Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 48.